

February 23, 2025

Luke 6:27-38

“This is Love ...”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more, they hated him and could not speak to him. One day, his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. Israel said to Joseph, "See if it is well with your brothers and with the flock. Bring me word." So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

The brothers saw Joseph from a distance. Before he came near, they planned how to kill him. They decided that they would throw him into one of the pits and would tell their father that a fierce animal had eaten him. But when Reuben heard of the plans he told the brothers to go ahead and throw him into a pit but to not lay a hand on him. Joseph was around 17 years old at the time.

The brothers saw a caravan of Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt and sold him to them for twenty shekels of slivers. The Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt and sold him at a profit to be a slave of an Egyptian man who later put Joseph into prison because of the false charges of his wife. Joseph was not released from prison until he was 30 years old. This was when Pharaoh released him and put him in charge of all Egypt.

Think about this for a moment. Consider what his own brothers did to him by selling him. Can you imagine the frustration of being a slave and then being put into prison for something you didn't even do? Thirteen years of Joseph's life down the drain - spent in slavery and in prison. How angry do you think you would be if you were Joseph? What would you do if you met your brothers later on down the road after becoming the most powerful man in the world next to Pharaoh?

I think that what is most amazing about Joseph is that when he finally meets his brothers again he does everything in his power to bring them to repentance and forgiveness. The actions of Joseph are stunning when his brothers come to Egypt to buy food because there is a horrible famine. Everything that Joseph says and does has one goal in mind - their salvation. That's all that Joseph finally cares about. He wants his brothers to know the Savior in and through his actions and words. He applies strong law and strong gospel. He hides his identity from them and treats them with a measured level of harshness that is designed to bring his brothers, who have been enemies toward him, to consider their sins, which they do. And, when the situation reaches a certain level of intensity, Joseph reveals to them that he is their brother saying: "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?"

Can you imagine the shock and what went through the minds of Joseph's brothers? And when his brothers could not answer, and were dismayed before him, he kindly said the words of our Old Testament lesson:

"Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in

the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt ... And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

This Is Love ... It wasn't that Joseph's brothers loved him. They didn't. They made themselves enemies. But Joseph loved them and loved them in such a way so that they would see love and come to love and a holy relationship with the Lord and a restored relationship as brothers. This is what Jesus means when he says, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." The goal is always the goal of Joseph. The goal is through law and gospel to bring someone to the forgiveness of sins - a loving relationship with the Lord and one another. This is what the apostle Paul means when he says in 1 Corinthians 16:14, "Let all that you do be done in love." This is what he means when he says in Romans 12:14-21,

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now all of this can make us feel rather puny (small and weak). We may look at Joseph and hear the words of Jesus and Paul and see that we have been no where near the examples that we have considered this morning. Like I asked earlier: How angry would you be with your brothers? How angry would you be with people who have made themselves into your enemies and have done incredibly cruel things to you? And yet, we are bid to love our enemies. We may feel rather "sheepish" when Jesus says, "if you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same." I would suspect that we can see a lot of failure on our part.

The words of Paul in Romans 5:8-11 are most appropriate here as we consider our tendency to be the opposite of Joseph in many situations. In those moments when we realize that we ourselves have been enemies of God and enemies of others we may consider:

God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if *while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More

than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

God has loved us in his one and only Son even though we did not love him. **This Is Love ...** It wasn't as if we loved God. He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. And sometimes, we have to be reminded of this, because there is this sinful flesh in us that would rather take vengeance on our enemies instead of doing the hard labor to love them with law and gospel into the true love of forgiveness and eternal life.

In deep love, the sinless Son of God became one of us. Jesus lived and suffered and died for us. Jesus lived and suffered and died for his enemies. He saved those who hated him - who abused him and caused him to suffer and die on the cross. He was there because of us. And this is what we must understand in the highest sense. We are those sinners and enemies who placed on his head the crown of thorns, who nailed his hands and feet to the tree, and who thrust the spear into his body that his blood and water might save us from ourselves. Our sins and death killed the Son of God that we might have forgiveness and life. The love of Jesus is simply as a hymn says: "For us by wickedness betrayed, For us, in crown of thorns arrayed, he bore the shame of cross and death; for us He gave His dying breath."

Because Christ loved us as sinners and enemies, we are enabled to love our enemies too. We do so because we realize that behind all of the sin and hostility and desire to hurt and harm someone is a person who is no different than us, in how we were sinners and enemies of Jesus. We all have one thing in common. We crucified Jesus but he was crucified to love and forgive that we might have eternal life! **This Is Love ...** and with his kind of love (the cleansing of us) there is love (the cleansing of others). May the forgiveness of sins turn us into people like Joseph!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott